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SUBJECT: SAMARRA MOSQUE RECONSTRUCTION TO BEGIN MID-JANUARY

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Greg D'Elia for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Senior Advisor to the Prime Minister on Reconstruction Haq al-Hakim told EmbOffs, MNF-I representatives, and UNAMI representative on December 12 that the GOI planned to start reconstruction of the Shia Golden Mosque in Samarra on January 15. According to al-Hakim, PM Maliki has set up a Samarra Support Council to advise the GOI on relevant security and reconstruction issues. Council membership consists of GOI ministerial and security officials together with tribal sheikhs. The Ministry of Municipalities will oversee all reconstruction-related contracts in Samarra and only issue contracts to Samarra resident contractors. Al-Hakim predicted that economic recovery in Samarra would take time and that relations between the GOI, Provincial Government, and Samarra residents would remain strained in the near term. End Summary.

Reconstruction Update

¶2. (C) Haq al-Hakim, Advisor to the Prime Minister on Reconstruction, told EmbOffs, MNF-I representatives, and UNAMI representative on December 12 that the GOI now planned to start reconstruction of the Shia Golden Mosque in Samarra in Salah ad Din Province on January 15. Al-Hakim also confirmed the creation of the Samarra Support Council on December 11, and explained that the Council would advise GOI officials on security and reconstruction-related issues. Al-Hakim said the Council will consist of GOI officials from the Ministries of Interior and Defense, as well as representatives from 14 of Samarra's 27 tribes. Al-Hakim explained that tribal sheikhs and their security personnel in Samarra will play a similar role to tribal sheikhs in Anbar by providing intelligence on al-Qaeda cells to Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces (ISF).

Samarra Residents at odds with GOI and Provincial Government Officials

¶3. (C) Historical tensions between Samarra residents and GOI and Salah ad Din provincial government officials, represent a significant obstacle in the reconstruction process, in al-Hakim's view. Al-Hakim said he saw no immediate remedy because tensions were deep-rooted, harkening back to experiences under the Saddam regime. As more money came on-line for Samarra reconstruction projects, there would be sharp competition, al-Hakim predicted, among provincial and municipal government officials to control GOI funding.

¶4. (C) To ensure that funding reaches Samarra, PM Maliki has allotted control of all reconstruction contracts to the Ministry of Municipalities, according to al-Hakim. The Ministry will only permit actual residents of Samarra to bid on reconstruction contracts, he added.

Security still the main Concern

¶15. (C) Al-Hakim emphasized that there must be adequate security for reconstruction. He also voiced continuing GOI concerns about the elevated rate of youth unemployment in Samarra and the susceptibility of youth to al-Qaeda's influence. He declared that economic development and job creation were critical in order to steer youth away from al-Qaeda. He also stated that the GOI was seeking to increase tribal support for ISF Commander MG Rasheed, the ISF commander in Samarra. Al-Hakim offered to meet with any tribal sheikhs who do not currently support MG Rasheed in order to address their concerns. He said the GOI hoped to secure as much buy-in as possible from all of Samarra's tribes.

Comment: Mid-January Target for Reconstruction may Slide

¶16. (C) Comment: The January 15 start date for reconstruction once again seems overly ambitious, particularly in view of precarious security in Samarra. The GOI appears to be warming to a more inclusive approach by including the Salah ad Din provincial government in reconstruction discussions, yet it must now also surmount the strained relationships between Samarra tribal sheikhs and the Provincial Council.
End Comment.

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